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## **GM Executive Gives Toyota Credit for Improving Detroit Firm's Quality**

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TRAVERSE CITY, Mich.--Most credit for General Motors Corp.'s improvement in its product quality and manufacturing prowess after years of trailing competitors goes to Toyota Motor Manufacturing North America, says Gary L. Cowger, GM group vice president of manufacturing and labor relations.

"The roots of our improvement is the Toyota Production System. We learned from them. We've got to give credit where credit is due," Cowger said at the Management Briefing Seminars, an annual gathering of hundreds of auto executives, consultants and others.

GM learned Toyota's manufacturing system, which emphasizes plant-level worker input and eliminating waste, after GM entered into a 50-50 joint venture with Toyota in Fremont, Calif., in 1984. The venture, New United Motor Manufacturing Inc., or NUMMI, makes Corollas and Tacomas for Toyota and the Chevy Prizm for GM. Early next year the sporty Pontiac Vibe station wagon also will be produced there.

Cowger said GM also learned ways to improve or update its manufacturing from an alliance it formed with Suzuki Motor Corp. in Ontario, Canada, called CAMI.

These alliances helped the world's largest automaker shake a long-running disinterest and sometimes even a hostility toward hearing new ideas, he said.

"For many years, individual divisions and business units within General Motors were so big and successful that there was little interest -- and even opposition, in some cases -- to adopting new ideas that came from somewhere else," Cowger said.

GM has created its own worldwide system for better manufacturing, modeled on Toyota's. Cowger said this plan emphasizes safety, quality, productivity and technology at GM's plants in the United States as well as around the world.

Cowger added that GM employees, especially workers on the factory floor and the UAW leadership, supported the new manufacturing system.

"We really have tried to improve our dialogue with the unions. We continue to talk with them so they now understand us and give us their input," he said.

GM's reputation for manufacturing and product quality has been boosted this year by:

The Harbour report, a widely respected study of manufacturing efficiency at North American assembly and stamping plants, this summer showed GM drastically reducing the gap between it and Ford Motor Co. and Chrysler Group. It also gained on Japanese automakers like, of course, Toyota.

A J. D. Power & Associates study of initial quality that rated GM ahead of Ford and Chrysler Group for the first time in many years. GM again closed the quality gap on automakers like Toyota and Honda Motor Co.

-- The recent Consumer Reports magazine rating of new vehicles, which named 11 of GM's 2001 models as recommended buys. A year ago, just four GM vehicles received that rating.

Morgan Stanley auto analyst Steve Girskey said GM seems to have its quality, efficiency and management moving in the right direction.

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"I think they are solid all the way around. I especially like them bringing in Bob Lutz, who will help with better products and processes. With him, (CFO) John Devine and (CEO) Rick Wagoner, they've got all the pieces in place. Now it's just a matter of execution," he said.

Cowger also gave the audience a glimpse of GM's product plans. He said the automaker will extend the wheelbase, raise the roof and add a third row of seats to its popular midsize sport-utility vehicles, the GMC Envoy and Chevy Trailblazer, two products rolled out by GM this year.

Those versions of the Envoy and Trailblazer are to be unveiled at an auto show, likely at Detroit's North American International Auto Show in 2002, and should be in dealer showrooms early next year.

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